

## OPINION

# Making San Diego's port secure

By Bob Filner

A few months prior to Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists cased San Diego's harbor, carefully plotting and planning for a potential attack. We now know that the horror of Sept. 11 came not from the sea but from the air in the form of hijacked planes. In the months that followed, our nation understandably focused on improving airport security. But today, nearly two years after Sept. 11, we must not forget that San Diego's port remains a vulnerable and highly visible potential terrorist target.

With the recent new terrorist warnings and the increasing instability in the Middle East, the threat to our nation is increasing. An outbreak of terrorist activity — with San Diego's port as a potential target — is a distinct possibility. The future of our country — and of our world — seems full of peril. We must protect ourselves. We must do all we can to make sure that our beautiful port is not in the crosshairs.

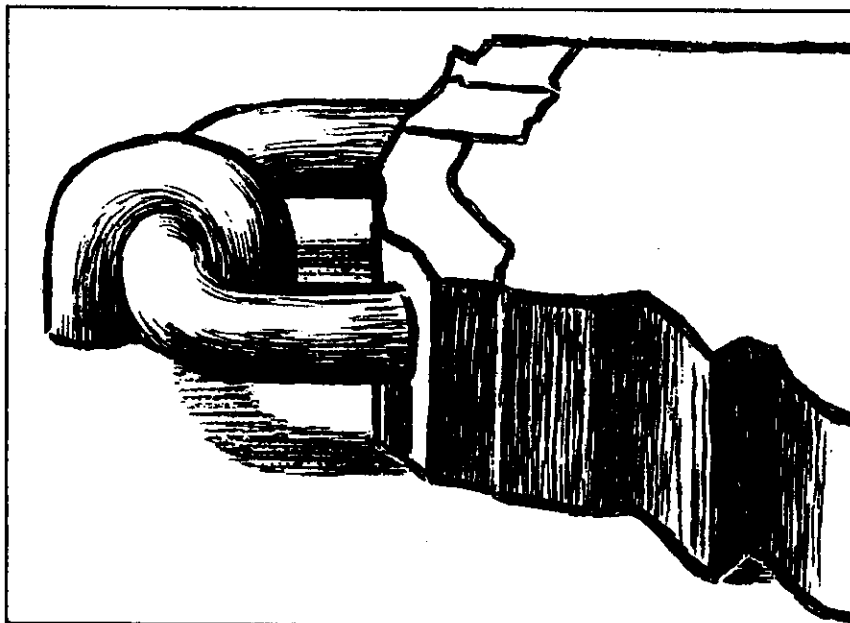
The situation is serious. Each month, traffic into San Diego's harbor is increasing. Annually, more than 100 cruise ships bring 220,000 passengers to San Diego. More than 260 cargo vessels bring millions of tons of goods to San Diego. And soon, container ships will bring more than 30,000 containers to San Diego — through the new Dole facility. In short, we have a massive flow of goods and people entering San Diego through our harbor each year.

Who is there to protect us? Who has the training, the personnel and the experience to protect San Diego's port — the millions of tons of goods entering it and the hundreds of thousands of people living nearby? I believe that the Coast Guard must be the cornerstone of San Diego's port security.

I was recently elected the senior Democratic member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Sub-committee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation. It is my responsibility to make sure that the U.S. Coast Guard has the resources and personnel necessary to carry out its mission.

This mission is vast. The Coast Guard is responsible for protecting all of San Diego's coastline — from the Orange County line at the San Clemente nuclear power plant all the way down to the U.S.-Mexico border. It must assess all vessels entering our

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harbor and board those that may present a threat.

The Coast Guard is also responsible for search-and-rescue missions, not only at sea, but also in the inland reservoirs and lakes of San Diego County. It carries out approximately 500 of these missions per year. And of course San Diego's harbor is home to between four and six large nuclear reactors aboard nuclear powered aircraft carriers, and many smaller reactors in the submarine fleet. The mere presence of these vessels raises the stakes for San Diego's security — one reason I have long pushed for the distribution of potassium iodide pills to all residents living within 50 miles of our harbor (the vast majority of the population of San Diego County). The Navy is directly responsible for the security of these vessels — but the Coast Guard plays an important supporting role.

With such a vast, crucial and expanding mission, one would think that the Coast Guard would have an adequate supply of the very best and most up-to-date equipment and technology. In many cases it does. Several of the Coast Guard's San Diego vessels are only a year or two old. But on a recent tour of our Coast Guard base, I was surprised to see that Coast Guard ships are launched from a dock that was built in the early 1930s!

Additionally, the men and women of the Coast Guard are some of the

smartest, hardest-working and most professional individuals you will find anywhere. But it is increasingly difficult for them to carry out their expanding mission with only three 110-foot Island Class patrol boats, two 87-foot patrol boats and three helicopters.

Personnel is another issue that needs to be addressed. San Diego's strategic importance as a naval base and its prominence as America's seventh largest city means that our Coast Guard should have more personnel to guard our vital port.

And finally, the Coast Guard now falls under the new Department of Homeland Security — a massive federal agency that is already bogged down in bureaucratic turf issues. Our Coast Guard personnel will remain vigilant as these issues are worked out. We must make sure that the transition to a new department goes as smoothly as possible. We must not distract the Coast Guard from its crucial mission.

As the senior Democrat on Coast Guard issues, I will fight to make San Diego's port as secure as possible. More active duty personnel must be assigned to San Diego. There is a need for added equipment and improved technology. We need a 21st century dock from which to launch 21st century vessels. And we need to make sure that the mission of the Coast Guard remains unclouded by bureaucratic bickering.

Like it or not, San Diego's port continues to be a potential terrorist target. But if we give the right tools and support to the men and women of the United States Coast Guard, we can sleep well at night, knowing that our safety and security are in good hands.